

Part 1: The Hussite Heresy

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Growing up in a family of funeral directors, I heard many stories about the grave. One such story was of an old railroad tycoon's family mausoleum. Entombed therein was, as my father described him, "a man with a stickpin studded with a diamond so grandiose as to make Louis XIV green with envy." When my father was asked to obtain the opening of the crypt to entomb another relative, the cemetery administration did everything in its power to thwart its opening. After a legal battle, the mausoleum was opened, only to discover that the cemetery keepers had seemingly turned to grave robbery, stealing the precious stone.

It would seem that spirit of grave robbery has enraptured the keepers of the Church as well, starting with the Second Vatican Council. However, rather than seeking gems of value, the grave robbers of the Council seem bent on robbing the pauper graves of heresy, exhuming rotting filth rather than buried treasure. For one such heresy, the innovators would have to go to the graves of Medieval Bohemia, where Jan Hus and his Utraquist beliefs were interred.

The True Origins of the Crisis

There has been a positive trend in traditionalist circles to pinpoint the genesis of the Liberal upheaval to the tumultuous Protestant Revolt. But often there is a mistake to see this revolt as being something sudden, as if there was a heart attack in the very heart of Christendom. Contrarily, the truth unveils a more insidious decay, akin to a creeping malaise that, under the guise of a pestilence (namely, the Black Death), gnawed steadily at the vitals of the Church. The Medieval Age was one known for its ecclesiastical clarity, with virtue ennobling and binding together Christendom with a strong moral authority — an authority based on the holiness and magnanimous nature of her clerics and religious. Will we ever see such a time where men like Saints Dominic, Francis and Simon Stock are each in concurrent ministry?

Yet, the Black Death eliminated predominantly those very paragons of virtue, the priests, ordained to administer the Sacraments to the afflicted. This plague brought about a crisis in vocations, mirroring the contemporary crisis brought forth by the metaphorical contagion of the 1960s. The priesthood was filled with men of dubious merit, filling now-soulless

institutions. To make matters worse, Peter's Chair itself was torn asunder, fragmented during the Great Western Schism by those who aligned more with temporal factions and personalities than with the divine will. Amidst such turmoil, the seeds of heresy find fertile ground to sprout.





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The “Proto-Protestants”

It was in the wasteland of the Church that certain “proto-Protestants” found success. Foremost among these precursors to Luther stood John Wycliffe (d. 1384), an Englishman of ambition who used the corrupt state of the Church as an excuse to satisfy his personal grievances and lust for power. He would inaugurate a heresy reminiscent of the ancient Donatists.^[1] For Wycliffe, the validity of a sacrament was dependent on the holiness of the minister, a doctrine which, in its turn, provided a convenient excuse for the state to take

lands away from delinquent clerics, a pretext that would later be carried out by Henry VIII and Cromwell.^[2] With this foundational error came a myriad of other heresies, including the denial of transubstantiation. As for Wycliffe, I believe Cardinal Newman assessed him well:

“That there were very great social and moral corruptions in the English Church at that time, and in the Church elsewhere, I see no reason to doubt.... Then, as all would-be reformers, he takes upon him duties which are not his — and gets into a false position. From attacking ecclesiastical abuses, he goes onto attack received doctrine.”^[3]

A Brief History of Jan Hus

Wycliffe’s doctrines, like seeds borne on the winds of intellectual curiosity, found fertile soil in Bohemia, the realm of the Czechs. This transfer of thought was facilitated by Bohemian scholars, who, having imbibed the teachings of Master Wycliffe at Oxford, carried this new philosophical ferment back to the esteemed halls of Prague’s premier university. Among the diligent scribes who replicated and disseminated these works stood Jan Hus (1369-1415), a priest who would ascend to the pulpit of the illustrious Bethlehem Chapel in Prague as its appointed preacher. Hus, with increasing fervor, augmented his rhetoric, eventually orchestrating a movement that bore the semblance of a coup within the university precincts of Prague and beyond with words of revolution.

In Protestant discourse it is frequently voiced that Jan Hus was wronged, ensnared by the Church’s guile, leading inexorably to his martyrdom — a narrative that found validation from none other than Pope John Paul II, who issued an apology for the ordeal. His gesture, coupled with accolades from both him and Pope Francis, enshrining Hus among the “Reformers of the Church,”^[4] strikes a dissonant chord. To posit a follower of Wycliffe, that harbinger of discord, as a reformer of anything save iniquity is a profound misjudgment! Despite the chorus of apologists, Hus was not beguiled into his fate but faced rightful condemnation. His estrangement from ecclesiastical privileges prefaced his summons to the Council of Constance, a meeting not of deceit but of accountability for his heresy.

St. Alphonsus Liguori describes the circumstances surrounding this for us:

“[Hus] was quite safe, on account of the Imperial safe conduct; but it is extraordinary that he never adverted to the clause inserted in it, granting him security as far as he was charged with crimes, **but not in regard to errors against the Church**; for it was stated that he would be exempt from all penalty in regard to his faith, if he would obey the decisions of the Council, after being heard in his defense, but not if he still obstinately remained attached to his errors. But, as we shall see, he refused to obey these conditions.

The Lutherans, therefore, are unjust in charging us with upholding that maxim, that faith is not to be kept with heretics, and alleging that as their excuse for not coming to the Council of Trent. Our Church, on the contrary, teaches that faith must be observed with even infidels or Jews, and the Council of Basil faithfully observed the guarantee given to the Hussites, though they remained obstinately attached to their errors.”[\[5\]](#) (Emphasis added)

The Utraquists

Jan Hus, steadfast in his convictions to the bitter end, faced condemnation to death after he repeatedly rebuffed opportunities to renounce the heretical teachings of Wycliffe. In the wake of Hus’s execution, the flames of the Hussite movement were fanned into a full-blown revolt against both the ecclesiastical and temporal authorities, marked by blasphemous displays of defacing crucifixes in obscene ways along with attacking monasteries.[\[6\]](#)



Jan Hus at the Stake, from a Hussite Prayer Book

Shortly after this, the Hussites split into two factions, much like the *Concilium* and *Communio* split after the Second Vatican Council. The more zealous among these factions, whose detailed exploits need not detain us here, found echoes in contemporary ecclesiastical divides, championing a doctrine tinged with Czech nationalism and apocalyptic fervor. Enigored by the victories of the talented general Jan Ziska (d. 1424), they claimed that Divine Providence would marshal the Hussite forces to miraculous victories, bringing forth the end times. These radicals would form a type of proto-hippy commune atop a hill, gatherings they termed Tabor. These Taborites celebrated “Mass” on tables outside or in houses with linen cloths alongside a stripped-down version of the Mass

in the vernacular consisting of little more than the words of institution and the Our Father.^[7] Conversely, the moderate faction, taking root in Prague, came to be known as the Utraquists, from their advocacy for communing *sub utraque specie* or “under both kinds.” This principle, a cornerstone of the common Hussite creed encapsulated in the Four Articles of Prague, argued for the necessity of the laity to partake of both the consecrated bread and wine during the Eucharist as essential for salvation.^[8] The justification for this belief was largely twofold, firstly made by citing John 6:54, which reads: “Except you eat the flesh of the Son of man, and drink His blood, you shall not have life in you.”

The Utraquists contended that receiving only the host does not constitute “drinking” the Blood of Christ, and so it must be obligatory to receive under both species. The second argument was a type of antiquarianism (all too familiar in the post-conciliar era) that says if it was done in antiquity, it warrants a revival today.

Disproving the Utraquists

The Utraquist argument from Scripture can be dismantled in a number of ways, firstly by pointing out that the passage in John is in the context of the Jews saying, “How can this man give us his flesh to eat?” (John 6:52), along with Our Lord saying, “He that eats of this bread shall live forever” (John 6:58). As Haydock says in his Bible commentary:

“To receive both the body and blood of Christ, is a divine precept, insinuated in this text; which the faithful fulfil, though they receive but in one kind; because in one kind they receive both the body and blood, which cannot be separated from each other. Hence life eternal is here promised to the worthy receiving, though but in one kind.”^[9]

Cornelius a Lapide in his excellent commentary on the Gospel also explains the passage in question quite well:

“Because under that species (*sub ea*) by virtue of consecration, there is there (*ponitur*) the Body of Christ, but by concomitance there is under the same the Blood of Christ, for the Body of Christ is not bloodless, nor can the Blood of Christ be separated from His glorified Body. As therefore he who takes the Eucharist under the species of wine by virtue of the words of consecration, takes directly and primarily the Blood of Christ, and yet by concomitance takes the Body of Christ, because the Blood of Christ cannot be without His Flesh; so in turn, he who takes the Flesh of Christ, under the species of bread, takes directly the Flesh of Christ, but by concomitance takes also His Blood. For in spiritual and sacramental and divine things food and drink are the same: consequently, to eat and to drink means the same thing.”^[10]

As for the question of receiving under both kinds being found in antiquity, Lapedona addresses it as follows in the same place:

“Formerly indeed the laity at times, not always, communicated in both kinds in the primitive Church.... But as the number of believers increased, the Church rightly abrogated this custom, because of the peril of irreverence, and various abuses which had been often experienced.”[\[11\]](#)

Such reasoning should come naturally for a reverent believer in the Real Presence, and we would be wise to remember the connection that the Hussites and their practices had to Wycliffe and his denial of transubstantiation — *lex orandi, lex credendi*. If every drop of the consecrated wine is truly the Body, Blood, Soul and Divinity of Christ, it would be dangerous to risk spilling such treasure en masse, and indeed we see this today. In my experience at *Novus Ordo* Masses years ago, before deciding to exclusively attend the Traditional Mass, I witnessed the chalice spilled many times by careless “Eucharistic ministers.” It also can tend to confuse the laypeople, making them think that receiving both is somehow “more” Christ, or that one is only Christ’s Body and one only His Blood.

The Faulty Council

With such a strong position, it was surprising that the Catholic episcopate compromised with heretics in an agreement at the Council of Basel in what is now known as the Prague Compacta. This allowed for a Hussite rite that could distribute communion under both kinds.[\[12\]](#) It would take two later Popes (Pius II and Paul III) to straighten out the conflict by realizing that such a rite promoted false beliefs and sentiments, and ultimately suppressed it. The Catholic Church would in very certain and clear terms bury this heresy at the Council of Trent, which declared during its Twenty First Session:

“CANON I: If any one saith that, by the precept of God, or, by necessity of salvation, all and each of the faithful of Christ ought to receive both species of the most holy sacrament not consecrating; let him be anathema.

CANON II: If any one saith that the holy Catholic Church was not induced, by just causes and reasons, to communicate, under the species of bread only, laymen, and also clerics when not consecrating; let him be anathema.

CANON III: If any one denieth, that Christ whole and entire — the fountain and author of all graces — is received under the one species of bread; because that — as some falsely assert — He is not received, according to the institution of Christ himself, under both species; let him be anathema.”[\[13\]](#)

Conclusion

And yet, 500 years later the Church would see the Utraquist heresy revived, the door being opened by a duplicitous statement in *Sacrosanctum Concilium* 55:

“The dogmatic principles which were laid down by the Council of Trent remaining intact, Communion under both kinds may be granted when the bishops think fit, not only to clerics and religious, but also to the laity, in cases to be determined by the Apostolic See, as, for instance, to the newly ordained in the Mass of their sacred ordination, to the newly professed in the Mass of their religious profession, and to the newly baptized in the Mass which follows their baptism.”[\[14\]](#)

Rather than being limited to the monumental moments of a man’s life, Communion under both kinds is commonly given at every Mass, with the General Instruction for the Roman Missal (GIRM) stating: “Holy Communion has a **fuller** form as a sign when it takes place under both kinds.”[\[15\]](#)

To be clear, reception of Holy Communion under both kinds is not erroneous per se. Yet, as previously discussed, it tends to foster irreverence and sow confusion amongst the faithful. In our present age, where a multitude remains uncatechized and estranged from the Church’s profound teachings on transubstantiation, adhering to a practice not deemed prudent or normative by the Western Church only exacerbates the befuddlement of believers. This approach inadvertently lends credence to the ambitions of Wycliffe, who aimed at undermining the belief in the real presence, rather than honoring the legacy of those saints who fervently sought to safeguard this sacred truth. In the pursuit of authentic, life-giving belief, may the Church choose not to rouse ancient heresies from their slumber, for we have the resurrection of Our Lord to kindle our hope, not a séance for doctrines that should remain silent.

Next in the series: Jansenism

[\[1\]](#) St. Alphonsus Liguori, *The History of Heresies and Their Refutation*, p. 245 (https://archive.org/details/history_of_heresies_and_their_refutation_1857-st_alphonsus_m_liguori).

[\[2\]](#) E. Michael Jones, *The Jewish Revolutionary Spirit*, 2nd Edition (Fidelity Press), p. 75.

[\[3\]](#) Cardinal Newman’s Letter to Viscount Fielding.

[4] https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2015/june/documents/papa-francesco_20150615_anniversario-jan-hus.html.

[5] Liguori, *op. cit.*, 253.

[6] Jones, *op. cit.*, 183.

[7] Howard Kaminsky, *A History of the Hussite Revolution*, p. 338. Cited in Jones, 195.

[8] <https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/15244b.htm>.

[9] Haydock Bible commentary on John 6:54.

[10] Cornelius a Lapide Commentary on the Gospel of John.

[11] Ibid.

[12] <https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/12126c.htm>;
<https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/07585a.htm>.

[13] Session 21 of the Canons and Decrees of the Council of Trent.

[14] https://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_1963_1204_sacrosanctum-concilium_en.html.

[15] Norms for the Distribution and Reception of Holy Communion under Both Kinds in the Dioceses of the United States of America.